

VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 31 Jul 72

TO: GAC

FROM: PAO

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

The following notations are the result of a study of the George Ball article in the July issue of Atlantic. The remarks are keyed to the pagination of the attached xeroxed article. Where Ball quotes the draft SNIE 10-3-64, we are obliged to rely on his accuracy as no copy of the draft seems to be extant.

Attachment

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"TOP SECRET"

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

October 5, 1964

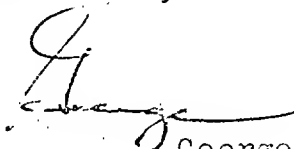
Dear Dean, Bob, and Mac:

I am enclosing my sceptical thoughts on the assumptions of our Viet-Nam policy. This amplifies our conversation a week ago as I promised to do.

The paper has the obvious limitations of a personal effort drafted mostly late at night and without benefit of staffing. I offer it as a focus for discussion and as an incitement to a broad study of the problem.

Only five copies of this document have been prepared. I am sending one each to the three of you and am retaining two in my safe. I think you will agree that it should not be discussed outside the four of us until we have had a chance to talk about it.

Yours ever,



George W. Ball

The Honorable
Dean Rusk,
Secretary of State.

TOP SECRET: THE PROPHECY THE PRESIDENT REJECTED

How valid are the assumptions underlying our Viet-Nam policies?

by George W. Ball

October 5, 1964

FOREWORD

I.

Purpose of Memorandum

Within the next few weeks we must face a major decision of national policy. The political situation in Saigon is progressively deteriorating. Even if that deterioration is checked, there seems little likelihood of establishing a government that can (a) provide a solid center around which the broad support of the Vietnamese people can coalesce or (b) conduct military operations with sufficient effectiveness to clean up the insurgency.

Under these circumstances the United States has four broad options:

1. Our *first* option is to continue the present course of action in an effort to strengthen the South Vietnamese effort, recognizing that at some point we shall probably either:

- a. Be forced to leave as a result of a neutralist coup or decision in Saigon; or
- b. Be forced to adopt one of the other options by the manifest hopelessness of the present course of action.

2. Our *second* option is to take over the war in South Viet-Nam* by the injection of substantial U.S. ground forces operating directly under a U.S. chain of military command.

3. Our *third* option is to mount an air offensive against the North in the hope of bringing pressure on Hanoi that would either:

- a. Persuade the Hanoi Government that the game is not worth the candle and that it should cease direction and support of the insurgency in the South; or
- b. Improve our bargaining position in relation to Hanoi and Peiping so as to make possible an acceptable political solution through negotiation.

4. Our *fourth* option is to adopt a course of action that would permit a political settlement without direct U.S. military involvement under conditions that would be designed hopefully to:

a. Check or at least delay the extension of Communist power into South Viet-Nam;

b. Provide the maximum protection for Thailand, Malaysia, and South Asia;

c. Minimize the political damage resulting to U.S. prestige in other Asian capitals, throughout the nonaligned world, and with our Western Allies.

The *first* option—to continue the present course of action—is not likely to lead to a clean-cut decision. To say this is not necessarily to condemn it. Yet if we are to seek a political solution without committing United States forces to direct military conflict by an air or ground offensive, it may be advantageous to set this process in train by an incisive decision under optimum circumstances rather than to let circumstances take their course. This question is discussed in Part Two of this memorandum.

The *second* option—to take over the war by the injection of substantial U.S. ground forces—offers the worst of both worlds. Our situation would, in the world's eyes, approach that of France in the 1950s. We would incur the opposition of elements in Viet-Nam otherwise friendly to us. Finally, we would find ourselves in *la guerre sale* with consequent heavy loss of American lives in the rice paddies and jungles.

The *third* option—to mount military pressure against the North primarily by an air offensive—is clearly preferable to the second. North Viet-Nam might well retaliate by ground action that would require the deployment of U.S. land forces. But there are obvious advantages in our initially choosing the offensive capability with which we have the unquestioned advantage. This memorandum raises a series of questions about the third and fourth options. It suggests lines of approach—tentative answers—to these questions. But it has not benefited by staff work which the complexity of the issues requires.

In raising these questions and offering some tentative answers, this memorandum creates a *prima facie* case for a possible alternative to intensifying our role in the Vietnamese war. Having met this burden of going forward, I suggest that the burden of proof is upon those who advocate the third option. It is they who seek increased U.S. involvement.

*For glossary and explanation of usage, see p. 49.

II.

How to Approach the Problem

1. *Primacy of the Political Purpose*

The maintenance of a non-Communist South Viet-Nam is of considerable strategic value to the United States. Secretary McNamara has said of Southeast Asia:

Its location across east-west air and sea lanes flanks the Indian sub-continent on one side and Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines on the other, and dominates the gateway between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In Communist hands, this area would pose a most serious threat to the security of the U.S. and to the family of Free World nations to which we belong. To defend Southeast Asia, we must meet the challenge in South Viet-Nam.

But, in spite of the strategic importance of the real estate involved, our primary motive in supporting the Government of South Viet-Nam is unquestionably political. It is to make clear to the whole Free World that we will assist any nation that asks us for our help in defending itself against Communist aggression.

For the purposes of this memorandum I have assumed that the political objective should be the principal frame of reference in assessing the cost of changing our present relations with South Viet-Nam either by directly involving the United States in an attack on the North or by the deliberate search for a political solution. That cost must be primarily measured by the political impact on other nations—the consequences for U.S. prestige and the credibility of our commitments elsewhere, the erosive effect on our alliances, and the impact on the will of other nations to continue to resist Communist aggression.

2. *South Viet-Nam Is Not Korea*

In approaching this problem, I want to emphasize one key point at the outset: The problem of South Viet-Nam is *sui generis*. South Viet-Nam is not Korea, and in making fundamental decisions it would be a mistake for us to rely too heavily on the Korean analogy. There are at least five principal differences between the present position of the United States in South Viet-Nam and our situation in South Korea in 1951:

a. We were in *South Korea* under a clear UN mandate.

Our presence in South Viet-Nam depends upon the continuing request of the GVN plus the SEATO protocol.

b. At their peak, UN forces in *South Korea* (other than ours and those of the ROK) included 53,000 infantrymen and 1000 other troops provided by fifty-three nations.

In Viet-Nam we are going it alone with no substantial help from any other country.

c. In 1950 the *Korean Government* under Syngman Rhee was stable. It had the general support of the

principal elements in the country. There was little factional fighting and jockeying for power.

In *South Viet-Nam* we face governmental chaos.

d. The *Korean War* started only two years after Korean independence. The Korean people were still excited by their newfound freedom; they were fresh for the war.

In contrast, the people of *Indochina* have been fighting for almost twenty years—first against the French, then for the last ten years against the NVN. All evidence points to the fact that they are tired of conflict.

e. Finally, the *Korean War* started with a massive land invasion by 100,000 troops. This was a classical type of invasion across an established border. It was so reported within twelve hours by the UN Commission on the spot. It gave us an unassailable political and legal base for counteraction.

In *South Viet-Nam* there has been no invasion—only a slow infiltration. Insurgency is by its nature ambiguous. The Viet Cong insurgency does have substantial indigenous support. Americans know that the insurgency is actively directed and supported by Hanoi, but the rest of the world is not so sure. The testimony of the ICC has been fuzzy on this point—and we have been unable to disclose our most solid evidence for fear of compromising intelligence sources.

As a result, many nations remain unpersuaded that Hanoi is the principal source of the revolt. And, as the weakness of the Saigon Government becomes more and more evident, an increasing number of governments will be inclined to believe that the Viet Cong insurgency is, in fact, an internal rebellion.

3. *The Present Situation*

The feeble condition of the Saigon Government is well understood. Perhaps the clearest appraisal of present conditions is in SNIE 53-2-64, unanimously approved by the United States Intelligence Board last Thursday:

Since our estimate of 8 September 1964 the situation in South Viet-Nam has continued to deteriorate. A coup by disgruntled South Viet-Nam military figures could occur at any time. In any case, we believe that the conditions favor a further decay of GVN will and effectiveness. The likely pattern of this decay will be increasing defeatism, paralysis of leadership, friction with Americans, exploration of possible lines of political accommodation with the other side, and a general petering out of the war effort. It is possible that the civilian government promised for the end of October could improve GVN esprit and effectiveness, but on the basis of present indications, this is unlikely.

4. *How to Formulate the Problem*

Confronted by this deterioration we find ourselves in a difficult dilemma:

Should we move toward escalation because of the weakness of the governmental base in Saigon in the hope that escalation will tend to restore strength to that base; or can we risk escalation without a secure

base and run the risk that our position may at any time be undermined?

So far we have focused our attention almost entirely on how we can (a) clean up the insurgency by actions in South Viet-Nam and (b) bring pressure on Hanoi to stop or materially reduce the insurgency. We have proceeded on the assumption that once having undertaken a program of military action in South Viet-Nam, we must pursue it until we achieve military success. We have assumed that without military success a negotiated solution could be achieved only at an unacceptable cost to the United States.

What we must now do, in view of the present precarious situation, is to undertake a rigorous balancing of accounts. We must examine the range of possible costs that might result from the widening of the war and the enlargement of the United States military commitment and balance those costs against the costs of a carefully devised course of action designed to lead to a political solution under the best conditions obtainable.

The purpose of this memorandum is to examine the assumptions that support each course of action. It is divided into two major parts:

Part One is an examination of the basic premises that underlie the case for achieving a solution through the application of additional military force.

Part Two is an examination of possible alternative courses of action for developing a political solution without the investment of further military force and at minimum cost to U.S. interests.

PART ONE

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PREMISES OF A POLICY OF MILITARY ACTION AGAINST NORTH VIET-NAM

A.

Conditions Necessary for Sustained Air Action Against the North

1. *Is our base in South Viet-Nam sufficiently secure to justify the undertaking of sustained air action against the North?*

The dangers of undertaking such air action without a secure base are at least two in number:

a. General Taylor has stated on more than one occasion that we should not become involved militarily with North Viet-Nam, and possibly with China, if our base in South Viet-Nam is insecure. (See Saigon's [cables numbered] 465 and 972.) If the political situation in Saigon should continue to crumble, air action against North Viet-Nam could at best bring a Pyrrhic victory. Even with diminished North Vietnamese support for the Viet Cong, a disorganized South Vietnamese Government would be unable to eliminate the insurgency.

b. The launching of an air offensive would involve a substantial additional United States commitment in South Viet-Nam. There is serious question whether such a commitment should be made so long as we are vulnerable to the risk that we may be asked to leave the country if a neutralist government emerges in Saigon.

2. *Would action against North Viet-Nam increase political cohesiveness and improve morale in South Viet-Nam so as to strengthen the governmental base?*

This contention deserves the verdict, known in the Scottish law, of "not proven."

Our objectives are not fully congruent with the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people. We are considering air action against the North as the means to a limited objective—the improvement of our bargaining position with the North Vietnamese. At the same time we are sending signals to the North Vietnamese that our limited purpose is to persuade them to stop harassing their neighbors, that we do not seek to bring down the Hanoi regime or to interfere with the independence of Hanoi.

When General Khanh temporarily raised the level of morale in July, he did so by promising the South Vietnamese people to lead them north in order to effect the reunification of Viet-Nam. "Certainly," he said on July 19, "our National Liberation Revolution will achieve success, and thus our beloved Vietnamese fatherland will become free, independent, and reunified." Only such statements, he felt, could help the "national war weariness." (See Saigon's 212 and 232.)

Reunification, however, is not a U.S. objective, nor can it be if we are to maintain a juridical posture acceptable to the rest of the world. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that the South Vietnamese would have their hearts lifted merely by watching the North Vietnamese suffer a sustained aerial bombardment. Most have families or at least friends in the North.

The following CIA report of the reaction in Saigon to our August bombings casts doubt on the easy assumption that air action against the North would necessarily improve South Vietnamese morale (Field Report, August 8):

1. On 6 August an American who speaks Vietnamese got the reactions of 20 or 25 Vietnamese of various walks of life in Saigon on the matter of the 5 August bombing of North Vietnamese installations by United States aircraft. It should be noted here that some of the Vietnamese were engaged in conversation among themselves and did not realize that the American nearby understood Vietnamese. Of these 20 to 25 individuals only one registered unequivocal support for the U.S. action. All other Vietnamese registered mild dissatisfaction to strong disapproval.

2. The one Vietnamese to declare support for the U.S. action was a sergeant in the airborne brigade who said he had been in the United States twice and considered himself more American than Vietnamese. On the other hand, none of the other Vietnamese of this small sample even indicated any particular dis-

The Prophecy the President Rejected

approval of the North Vietnamese attacks on American ships. About four of the individuals mentioned that they had been listening to Radio Hanoi and that Hanoi's version was different from the American. As a result they were not sure of the facts of the matter.

3. In almost all the cases the principal reason given for disapproval of the bombing action was that the Americans were now unilaterally killing Vietnamese while in the past the Americans were merely helping Vietnamese to kill Vietnamese. Another main reason for their disapproval was fear that the conflict would spread and more directly affect them.

The available evidence leads to the tentative cautionary conclusion that if air bombardment is not followed by the fact—or even the promise—of a military invasion of North Viet-Nam, there is no assurance that it would improve South Vietnamese morale over any significant period. We did bomb North Vietnamese targets on August 5. But since then there has been an abortive coup, a Montagnard revolt, further factional fighting, a weakening of Khanh's position, and general deterioration.

It may be argued, of course, that the observable effects of an isolated attack such as that of August 5 are not a fair indication of what might be the consequences of a sustained program of military pressure against the North. That is true. But to the extent that military action would invite significantly increased reprisals or would raise the specter of Chinese involvement, any momentary euphoria might well be replaced by demoralization. An air attack on Saigon, for example, would probably have anything but a cohesive effect on the population. On the contrary, it might incite further factionalism, contribute to war exhaustion, and lead to the destruction of the present weak governmental structure.

In sum, I find no assurance that morale can be improved by a U.S. air offensive against North Viet-Nam. Morale depends instead on effective political leadership and an improvement of the conditions of life. The increase in casualties that would result from escalation would be unlikely to appeal to a war-weary people.

B.

What Is the Most Favorable Result We Could Hope to Achieve by Military Action Against North Viet-Nam?

1. *Can we, by military pressure against North Viet-Nam, persuade the Hanoi Government to stop Viet Cong action in the South or at least reduce that action to the point where the Viet Cong insurgency becomes manageable?*

The Hanoi Government has been deeply committed to its present course of policy for many years. (See the documented analysis in "A Threat to the Peace," Department of State Publication 7308.) It is not likely to give up its objectives easily.

At the moment Hanoi believes that it is close to a victory in South Viet-Nam. So long as the situation in South Viet-Nam does not materially improve—so long as the Saigon Government continues in a state of ineffectiveness or disintegration—Hanoi will cling to the hope of ultimate victory.

So long as it believes victory is near, it will probably be willing to accept very substantial costs from United States air action. Its public posture, at home and abroad, and its private behavior, both diplomatic and military, support this hypothesis.

Not only will North Viet-Nam continue to have the will to support the insurgency but it will continue to have the ability.

Sigma II, conducted by the Joint War Games Agency, Cold War Division, Joint Chiefs of Staff, from September 8 to 11, 1964, revealed that exhausting the 1964 target list presently proposed for air strikes would not cripple Hanoi's capability for increasing its support of the Viet Cong, much less force suspension of present support levels on purely logistical grounds.

2. *Assuming that we might, through military pressure, persuade the Hanoi Government that it was paying more for the Viet Cong insurgency than it was gaining, would that Government in fact have the capability to stop or materially reduce the Viet Cong action to the point where it became manageable?*

In principle, the answer should probably be in the affirmative. But what is far more likely is that the Government in Hanoi would publicly disclaim further connection with the Viet Cong insurgency while in fact continuing to supply covert help. As stated in "Alternatives for Imposition of Measured Pressures against North Viet-Nam" (Policy Planning paper, March 1, 1964, Tab 2, page 4):

... Probably the most that could be expected in the best of circumstances, would be that the DRV would ultimately slacken and ostensibly cease its support of the VC, while pressing for a cease-fire in the South, ordering the VC to regroup and lie low, and covertly preparing to resume the insurrection as soon as the DRV thought it could get away with it. We can, of course, have no assurance that such "best of circumstances" would obtain, even if considerable damage had been done the DRV. . . .

3. *If a complete military victory is not possible, can we, by military pressure against North Viet-Nam, at least improve our bargaining position to the point where an acceptable negotiated solution might be achieved?*

This question cannot be answered categorically. So far, the only kind of bargain Hanoi has been interested in is one that would contemplate the withdrawal of the United States forces. The mere fact that we have levied destruction on North Viet-Nam would not lay the basis for a viable negotiated settlement unless at the same time three conditions had been met:

a. An effective government had been established in Saigon.

b. The Viet Cong insurgency had been reduced to a level where it could not eliminate a South Vietnamese Government deprived of U.S. support.

c. Effective international arrangements had been established to prevent further infiltration of supplies and material by the North Vietnamese Government.

4. *If, in fact, the United States, by direct employment of military power, did succeed in softening up the Hanoi Government, would this improve the climate for a negotiation that would be likely to include other Asian and neutral powers?*

The fundamental premise that it would be easier to deal with North Viet-Nam after an air offensive is, in my view, based on a wrong assessment of the political impact of such a course worldwide and its effect on our bargaining strength. These issues will be examined more fully in a later section.

C.

Possible Consequences of U.S.-Initiated Escalation

1. *Would the Hanoi Government yield to the pressure generated by our air offensive without first undertaking a major invasion of South Viet-Nam by North Vietnamese forces?*

In reacting to our air offensive, the North Vietnamese Government would be likely to follow the principle that each party would choose to fight the kind of war best adapted to its resources. If we were to escalate by employing air power—a type of offensive capability in which we have the unquestioned advantage—the North Vietnamese would be clearly tempted to retaliate by using ground forces, which they possess in overwhelming numbers. As stated in the October 3 draft SNIE (which the Intelligence Board is considering today), “. . . there would be a substantial danger that they would increase the pressure of the insurgency in South Viet-Nam, introducing additional forces to speed the collapse of the GVN and thus cut the base from under the US position before North Viet-Nam had suffered unacceptable damage.”

At the least we could expect Hanoi to make a larger infiltration effort. It is estimated that within two months an additional two divisions could be *cov-erly* introduced through Laos and across the DMZ.

Hanoi might also increase terror and sabotage in the South, including terror attacks on American personnel in Saigon and even the bombing of Saigon and other urban centers to induce demoralization.

Nor can we rule out the possibility that Hanoi would undertake an overt invasion. By directly bombing North Viet-Nam, we would have removed the political inhibition against overt use of force. It is estimated that in two months' time, it could put six divisions (roughly 60,000 men) across the zone and through the Panhandle. This could not, of course, be

done without expense. It would expose the North Vietnamese forces to counterblows from the air, especially against lines of communication and supply.

2. *Would the Peiping Government permit the North Vietnamese Government to stop the Viet Cong insurgency without its intervening directly on a limited or total basis?*

China has substantial interests that would be jeopardized by United States air strikes against North Viet-Nam.

a. Its *first* interest is to avoid the loss of face that it would suffer if it did not come to the assistance of a Communist neighbor against a United States attack. Peiping has, since our strike of August 5, repeatedly proclaimed at the most authoritative levels that “aggression against the DRV is aggression against China.” It has also conducted continuous propaganda campaigns to prepare its military and civilian populace for helping North Viet-Nam. On the other side of the coin, Hanoi's posture in the Sino-Soviet dispute has persistently supported Peiping's positions and attacked those adopted by Moscow, at least since June, 1963, and fear of subservience to Peiping does not seem to have materially affected Hanoi's course of action in confronting either Moscow or Washington.

b. A *second* Chinese interest is to safeguard its own security, which would be menaced by United States action directed at the establishment of Southeast Asia as a permanent base of threatening United States power. This seems clearly to have been the Chinese motivation in attacking when we approached the Yalu River.

c. A *third* interest is Chinese concern for the main rail line linking coastal Kwangtung with inner Yunnan Province. This line transits North Viet-Nam and is vital to the security of South China.

Already Communist China has involved itself in the air defense of North Viet-Nam by deploying Chinese pilots and aircraft to Phuc Yen and in the installation of joint Sino-Vietnamese air warning systems.

Of course, the question of possible Chinese involvement cannot be answered categorically one way or another. The October 3 draft SNIE concludes that in the face of sustained U.S. air attacks on North Viet-Nam, “a large-scale Chinese Communist ground or air intervention would be unlikely.” But we would be imprudent to undertake escalation without assuming that there was a *fair chance* that China would intervene. We made a contrary assumption in Korea in October of 1950 with highly unfortunate consequences. Let us recall the circumstances.

“In your opinion,” President Truman asked General MacArthur, “is there any chance that the Chinese might enter the war on the side of North Korea?”

MacArthur shook his head. “I'd say there's very little chance of that happening. They have several hundred thousand men north of the Yalu, but they haven't any air force. If they tried to cross the river

our air force would slaughter them. At the most perhaps 60,000 troops would make it. Our infantry could easily contain them. I expect the actual fighting in North Korea to end by Thanksgiving. We should have our men home, or at least in Japan, by Christmas."

At the very moment that President Truman and General MacArthur were talking, there were already more than 100,000 Chinese Communist troops in North Korea, and another 200,000 were ready to cross the Yalu. By mid-November at least 300,000 Chinese would be poised to strike—and the ROK, American and other UN forces would not even be aware of their presence. Before the war was over, the Chinese Communist armies in Korea would reach a peak strength of more than a million men.

(Don Lawson: *The United States in the Korean War*, p. 79)

3. *Would it be possible for the United States to control the process of escalation so as to achieve the requisite improvement in its bargaining position without danger of triggering the kind of North Vietnamese or Chinese action envisaged by paragraphs 1 and 2?*

This question goes to the heart of the premise upon which the proposals of military pressure against North Viet-Nam are based—that we can take offensive action while controlling the risks and that we can halt the process of escalation whenever we feel we have accomplished our objective or the enemy is about to respond with unacceptable force.

I find this premise of doubtful validity. As we mount the scale of progressively more intensive air attacks on North Viet-Nam, either Hanoi will respond or it won't. Either Peiping will respond or it won't. (And I assume that what is wanted is not a preventive war with China.)

If neither responds, we shall be led to continue our attacks until there is some indication by Hanoi that it is ready to negotiate. But once Hanoi or Peiping does respond, our own counteraction will have to be measured by the character of that response.

It is in the nature of escalation that each move passes the option to the other side, while at the same time the party which seems to be losing will be tempted to keep raising the ante. To the extent that the response to a move can be controlled, that move is probably ineffective. If the move is effective, it may not be possible to control—or accurately anticipate—the response.

Once on the tiger's back we cannot be sure of picking the place to dismount.

D.

Need for U.S. Ground Forces

1. *Would it be possible to repel a heightened ground effort by North Vietnamese forces against South Viet-Nam without substantial U.S. land forces?*

The answer to this question is clearly "no."

In the case of an invasion it is obvious.

But even substantially increased infiltration from North Viet-Nam would require substantial American ground units to defend our bases from attacks by the North.

We cannot counter ground forces by air power alone, as we quickly learned in Korea.

And we should remember that in South Viet-Nam the nature of the terrain reduces the premium on modern firepower and logistic equipment even more than it did in Korea.

2. *Could substantial U.S. combat forces be committed to South Viet-Nam without substantially altering the relationship of the United States to the war?*

Up to now we have maintained in the eyes of the world that our forces were in South Viet-Nam solely to advise and train South Vietnamese forces and assist them with logistics. The injection of substantial United States combat forces would necessarily change our relationship to the management of the war. Such forces would be assuming conspicuous combat roles under a direct United States chain of command.

At the same time the presence of United States combat troops would necessarily mean a progressive taking-over of many of the functions now exercised by the South Vietnamese.

The French would take the lead in pointing out that we had now clearly put ourselves in the position of France in the early 1950s—with all the disastrous political connotations of such a posture. Asians would not miss the point.

The repercussions of this action would also be substantial on the home front. Americans would feel, for the first time, that they had again been committed by their leaders to an Asian war. The frustrations and anxieties that marked the latter phases of the Korean struggle would be recalled and revived—and multiplied in intensity.

3. *Could additional forces needed for security against the consequences of escalation in Southeast Asia be provided without large-scale U.S. mobilization? How fast could the United States move to carry out such mobilization?*

(The answer to this question has not yet been developed.)

E.

Pressure for Use of Atomic Weapons

1. *If the conflict stalemated on land—and particularly if the Chinese intervened—would the United States be likely to resort to the use of at least tactical nuclear weapons?*

If ground fighting should drag on for a sustained period, the U.S. forces would begin to take substantial casualties.

At this point, we should certainly expect mounting pressure for the use of at least tactical nuclear weapons. The American people would not again accept

the frustrations and anxieties that resulted from our abstention from nuclear combat in Korea.

The rationalization of a departure from the self-denying ordinance of Korea would be that we did not have battlefield nuclear weapons in 1950—yet we do have them today.

At the same time we must recognize that in the eyes of the world, and of Americans, the distinction between tactical and strategic nuclear weapons carries little conviction.

2. Could nuclear weapons be used without substantial political costs to our world position?

Our employment of the first tactical nuclear weapon would inevitably be met by a Communist accusation that we use nuclear weapons only against yellow men (or colored men). It is Communist dogma that this is the reason that we used atomic bombs against Japan but not against Germany in World War II. There would be a profound shock around the world not merely in Japan but also among the nonwhite nations on every continent.

In this connection we should recall the reactions in December, 1950, when President Truman even suggested the possibility of using atomic bombs in the Korean War—at a time when we still had the nuclear monopoly.

As stated by T. R. Fehrenbach, in *This Kind of War*:

Within three hours, there was resulting explosion.

The *Times* of 1 December remarked: The President's mention of an atom bomb caused consternation and alarm in Britain and brought from France official disapproval. Most U.N. delegates were agreed that it would be politically disastrous to use the bomb in Asia.

Nothing so awakened the French Assembly as mention of the bomb. To the fear of the bomb lately has been added a fear of General MacArthur, who is regarded as impulsive and reckless in his reported desire to bomb Manchuria and risk extending the war.

A headline read: Britons dismayed by Truman's talk—Attlee will fly to Washington to discuss crisis with President.

The *London Times* editorialized: [Truman] touched upon the most sensitive fears and doubts of this age. . . .

Winston Churchill, in Commons, warned the West against involvement in Asia at the expense of Europe. The House cheered Prime Minister Attlee's announced flight to Washington.

In Melbourne, Australia, where there were few friends of Red China, newspapers expressed the hope that diplomatic skill would avert a conflict with Communist China. The *Melbourne Herald* wrote: The Chinese can no longer be despised militarily. Their revolutionary leaders obviously command unity and loyalty which Chiang never attained.

Italian Communists and anti-Communists alike expressed deep fears of general war.

And papers all over the world stated that MacArthur should have halted the U.N. armies no farther

north than the middle of North Korea, leaving a buffer between them and Manchuria.

The Communists would certainly point out that we were the only nation that had ever employed nuclear weapons in anger. And the Soviet Union would emphasize its position of relative virtue in having a nuclear arsenal which it had never used.

At the same time, our action would liberate the Soviet Union from inhibitions that world sentiment has imposed on it. It would upset the fragile balance of terror on which much of the world has come to depend for the maintenance of peace. Whether or not the Soviet Union actually used nuclear weapons against other nations, the very fact that we had provided a justification for their use would create a new wave of fear.

The consequences of all this cannot be overstated. For the past four years we have been making slow but perceptible progress toward a new era of relations between the two centers of power in this mid-twentieth-century world. But the first use of the bomb by the United States would destroy all this. It would set us back to the tense and suspicious days before the Cuban missile crisis. Prospects for disarmament and other measures for lowering the general level of world anxiety would be destroyed.

Moreover, we would feel the effects deeply at home. The first firing of a nuclear weapon (whether tactical or strategic, it makes no difference) would revive a real but latent guilt sense in many Americans. It would create discouragement and a profound sense of disquiet. It would generate resentment against a Government that had gotten America in a position where we had again been forced to use nuclear power to our own world discredit.

F.

Possibility of Soviet Intervention

1. What are the chances that the Soviet Union might intervene before or after the intervention of China and what form would Soviet intervention be likely to take?

There is no reason to expect Soviet military intervention at an early stage of a U.S. air offensive against North Viet-Nam. But the Soviet Union would certainly be expected to lead a propaganda attack against U.S. imperialism and to support the political demands of Hanoi. This is an imperative of Soviet policy that derives from its competition with Red China for domination of the Communist parties around the world.

If Red China should decide at some stage in the struggle to intervene directly by the interjection of its own land forces, this would, of course, present a new situation. Peiping could then put great pressure on the Soviet Union to provide assistance—at least in matériel. This would probably have the effect of nar-

The Prophecy the President Rejected

rowing the schism between Moscow and Peiping, for we should have provided both sides with a common enemy.

Finally, our expenditure of even a single nuclear weapon would impose the ultimate test for the integrity of international Communism. While no one can be certain, the best judgment is that the Soviet Union could not sit by and let nuclear weapons be used against China.

G.

The Relative Political Costs of Escalation

1. Would the clear evidence of our intention to carry out our commitments increase United States prestige around the world?

The assumption which has governed our planning with respect to South Viet-Nam has been that the United States must successfully stop the extension of Communist power into South Viet-Nam if its promises are to have credence. It is argued that failing such an effort our Allies around the world would be inclined to doubt our promises and to feel that they could no longer safely rely upon American power against Communist aggressive ambitions.

We have by our own public statements contributed to such a reaction. (See, for example, Attorney General Kennedy's comment in Germany that if Americans did not stop Communism in South Viet-Nam, how could people believe that they would stop it in Berlin?)

Against these concerns one must balance the view of many of our Allies that we are engaged in a fruitless struggle in South Viet-Nam—a struggle we are bound to lose.

They fear that as we become too deeply involved in a war on the land mass of Asia, we will tend to lose interest in their problems. They believe that we would be foolish to risk bogging ourselves down in the Indochina jungle. They fear a general loss of confidence in American judgment that could result if we pursued a course which many regarded as neither prudent nor necessary.

What we might gain by establishing the steadfastness of our commitments we could lose by an erosion of confidence in our judgment.

Obviously the balance of these two considerations would vary widely from country to country depending on the specific national interest and national experience of each nation involved.

The balance would also be affected by the depth of the American involvement on the one hand and the manner in which we might propose to achieve a political solution without direct military involvement on the other.

One point, however, is clear. We cannot assume that an escalation of the war in South Viet-Nam involving a more profound American engagement would be universally applauded by our friends and

Allies or that it would necessarily operate to increase our prestige or the confidence placed in us.

2. How would countries in Southeast Asia react to these courses of action?

The Philippines and Thailand would have an initial preference for escalation over any immediate move for a political solution. They might be prepared at the outset of escalation to offer material help in the form of bases and perhaps technical personnel. But this initial reaction would last only so long as our actions showed unequivocal signs of success in halting North Vietnamese aggression in South Viet-Nam and produced no serious threat of Red China's involvement. Should Red China come to North Viet-Nam's defense, Thailand, at least, would be alarmed at the dangers of an overland thrust from the North.

It is possible that the move for a political solution might create a crisis of confidence on the part of Thailand. Yet with their usual pragmatism and realism, the Thais would be unlikely to blame the United States were Saigon simply to give up the fight. So much would depend upon the sequence of developments, the final settlement, and what we were prepared to offer as a guarantee of our willingness to assist Thailand against aggression, that I cannot now make a more precise prediction.

Suspicious or hostile neutrals—Burma, Cambodia, and Indonesia—would have mixed feelings about either course. But they would no doubt be happier with a political solution out of a simple desire to see the "mess" in South Viet-Nam disappear. A U.S. air offensive against North Viet-Nam would be publicly condemned in both Cambodia and Indonesia, but only Cambodia might be likely to give marginal help to the Communists.

3. How would this affect our position in Japan and elsewhere in Asia?

Japanese views have not yet crystallized on the importance to Japan's security of Southeast Asia, much less South Viet-Nam. Tokyo seems to have little faith, at present, that South Viet-Nam can long resist the Viet Cong. Under these circumstances, a carefully worked out political solution would presumably be preferred to escalation, especially were escalation to bring in Red China. This latter contingency would prove embarrassing for the government if any use were made of our bases or our forces in Japan.

Of all the Asian countries the Republic of China and the Republic of Korea would probably have the strongest preference for escalation and most determined opposition to a political solution. For Taiwan, the stakes would be nothing less than recovery of the mainland as opposed to an expansion of Red Chinese power. Seoul would interpret our willingness to remain committed in Asia in one direction or the other, depending upon how we handled these courses of action.

4. What would be the effect on the United States's position in the other less-developed countries?

The general attitude of the less-developed countries is not hard to predict. In my view a carefully worked out political arrangement would cost the United States little with most of the less-developed countries, particularly if it appeared that in joining in developing such an arrangement we were responding to the wish of the South Vietnamese people to bring a halt to the war. The loss of face to the United States under these circumstances should not be at all substantial.

On the other hand, the opinion of the less-developed countries would strongly oppose an air offensive against North Viet-Nam. The element of race would have a strong influence, as well as the disparity in strength and size between ourselves and the Vietnamese. We could not avoid a reaction in many of the less-developed countries that we had substituted ourselves for the French in the continuation of a colonial war.

Our loss of prestige in the nonaligned countries, or even in most of those less-developed countries allied with us in defense arrangements, would, of course, be enormously magnified if we were led to use even one nuclear weapon.

5. *What would be the effect on the United States's position in Europe?*

Most of our European allies would, I think, applaud a move on our part to cut our losses and bring about a political solution. Opinion in France is, of course, clear on this question. But opinion in other European countries would also be against any escalation of the war that might conceivably lead to the involvement of European combat forces on the Asian Mainland.

As has repeatedly been pointed out in this memorandum, the issues in Indochina are not clearly defined, as they were in Korea. Even during the Korean War our Allies grew unhappy with the extent of our involvement as the war dragged on—even those who had applauded our demonstration of steadfastness at the beginning.

I discussed this general problem of European reactions to Viet-Nam with [NATO] Secretary-General Brosio the other night. In Italy, he said, public opinion was not sympathetic with the American efforts in South Viet-Nam—even though our position was understood by some of the leaders at the top level of the Government. In Germany he had observed a willingness to accept America's present Southeast Asia policies "as a matter of correctness," but Germans would certainly feel deep concern if they ever thought we were becoming involved on the Asian land mass to the point where we might begin to reduce our defense efforts in Europe.

The British are, of course, a special case because of their own interests in Malaysia. I cannot, however, believe that any British Government—particularly a Labor Government—would be happy if our air offensive should continue for any length of time against a small Asian country.

In final essence, our influence in Europe depends not merely on the defense efforts we are making, but on European confidence in our judgment and restraint. If we were to take any action that might be regarded as demonstrating either a lack of judgment or a lack of restraint, we would greatly undermine our European position.

The French are already busily promoting rumors that the United States is so involved in Southeast Asia that it can no longer be depended upon to concern itself with Europe. Once we mounted an air offensive that might lead to substantial escalation, this rumor would begin to find a willing audience in several European countries.

PART TWO

THE PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF A POLITICAL SOLUTION

A.

The Thrust of the Analysis

The analysis contained in Part One suggests the following:

1. Unless the political base in Saigon can be made secure, the mounting of military pressure against the North would involve unacceptable risks.

2. To persuade the North Vietnamese Government to leave South Viet-Nam alone, military pressure against Hanoi would have to be substantial and sustained.

3. Even with substantial and sustained military pressure it is improbable that Hanoi would permanently abandon its aggressive tendencies against South Viet-Nam so long as the governmental structure in South Viet-Nam remained weak and incapable of rallying the full support of the South Vietnamese people.

4. The United States cannot substitute its own presence for an effective South Vietnamese Government and maintain a free South Viet-Nam over a sustained period of time.

5. We must be clear as to the profound consequences of a United States move to apply sustained and substantial military pressure against North Viet-Nam. The response to that move—or even the deployments required by prudence in anticipation of a response—would radically change the character of the war and the United States's relation to the war. The war would become a direct conflict between the United States and the Asian Communists (North Viet-Nam cum Red China).

6. Once the United States had actively committed itself to direct conflict with the North Vietnamese and Hanoi had responded, we could not be certain of controlling the scope and extent of escalation. We

cannot ignore the danger—slight though some believe it to be—that we might set in train a series of events leading, at the end of the road, to the direct intervention of China and nuclear war.

7. Finally, it remains to be proved that in terms of U.S. prestige and our world position, we would risk less or gain more through enlarging the war than through searching for an immediate political solution that would avoid deeper U.S. involvement.

D.

What Political Solution?

The analysis in Part One logically raises the question as to what is meant by political solution. How could this be achieved at minimum cost and maximum security?

I can set down no more than a sketchy outline of the possibilities. For quite obvious reasons, we have so far not undertaken any intensive expert study of this question.

We have spent months of concentrated effort trying to devise ways and means to advance the present policy of winning the war in the South.

We have spent weeks trying to devise an effective strategy for applying increasing military pressure against the North.

But we have given almost no attention to the possible political means of finding a way out without further enlargement of the war.

If we are to make informed decisions on the range of critical issues that now confront us—decisions that would reflect the evidence and arguments on more than one side of the case—we should undertake a searching study of this question without further delay.

As a preliminary contribution to such a study I suggest consideration of the following issues—among others.

C.

Clearing the Air for a Negotiated Solution

1. Is it realistic to think we can improve our negotiating position by an air offensive?

Most of those who argue for applying sustained military pressure against the North disclaim the objective of total military victory. They contend instead that such military pressure is necessary in order to improve the bargaining position of the United States—or, in other words, in order to enable us to bargain from strength.

This contention presupposes that it will be possible to achieve a political solution that will satisfy the major requirements of American policy—but only after the war has been transformed from its present character of a conflict between North Viet-Nam (cum Red China) and South Viet-Nam (cum the United

States) into a clear demonstration of the superiority of U.S. to Asian power and determination.

I reject this thesis. In my view the transformation of the war in this manner would create enormous risks for the United States and impose costs incommensurate with the possible benefits. But at the same time I would challenge also the thesis that a negotiation arrived at after sustained military pressure would necessarily result in a more favorable political solution than a negotiation that was not preceded by such pressure—even assuming that we were able to avoid a major war in the process.

The position I am urging becomes clear, I think, when we examine the elements that would constitute a solution adequate to our political requirements.

D.

What Provisions Should We Seek to Have Included in a Negotiated Settlement?

Ideally a negotiated settlement of the problem of South Viet-Nam should include the following provisions:

(a) The effective commitment of North Viet-Nam to stop the insurgency in the South;

(b) The establishment of an independent government in Saigon capable of cleaning up the remaining elements of insurgency once Hanoi has ceased its direct support;

(c) Recognition that the Saigon Government remains free to call on the United States or any other friendly power for help if it should again need assistance; and

(d) Enforceable guarantees of the continued independence of the Saigon Government by other signatory powers.

E.

What Kind of Political Settlement Might We Reasonably Hope to Achieve by Negotiation Following Sustained Military Pressure on the North?

1. How would we move from sustained air attack to the conference table?

The draft SNIE 10-3-64 entitled "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible U.S./GVN Courses of Action" indicates that the range of Communist reactions to a U.S. air offensive might include:

- a. Retaliatory military moves on the ground;
- b. A temporary suspension of Viet Cong action;
- c. A drive to increase the insurgency in South Viet-Nam by the introduction of additional forces "to speed the collapse of the GVN and thus cut the base from under the U.S. position before North Viet-Nam had suffered unacceptable damage";

- d. An effort to mobilize international pressure against the United States and a suggestion of some willingness to accommodate U.S./GVN views in order to bring about a new conference.

The SNIE suggests that it is unlikely that Hanoi and Peiping would undertake large-scale Chinese Communist ground or air intervention in view of Communist China's desire to avoid a full-scale war with the United States. However, they do not—and in the nature of things cannot—rule out this possibility categorically. Nor can we prudently do so in designing a South Vietnamese policy in view of the magnitude of the costs if we are wrong.

As of the time this is written, there does not appear to be full unanimity in the Intelligence Community as to the emphasis to be placed on the alternative possibilities that Hanoi might react to sustained U.S. air attack by (a) temporarily slowing down or suspending Viet Cong action or (b) reinforcing and accelerating the South Vietnamese insurgency. If Hanoi were, in fact, to introduce additional forces into South Viet-Nam and achieve conspicuous Viet Cong successes, we should be faced with substantial pressure for the United States to move from air attacks against North Viet-Nam to a direct involvement of American forces against the insurgency.

Certainly the conclusions of the SNIE—tentative as they are—underline the fragility of the governmental structure in the South and suggest clearly the hazards of a quantum jump in United States military involvement through an air offensive, at a time when the legitimacy of our presence could be destroyed overnight by the emergence of a neutralist government in Saigon.

Certainly, if, following the institution of an air offensive, Hanoi were to begin serious agitation to summon an international conference to halt "U.S. aggression," we should have to respond quickly before the Saigon Government crumbled beneath us and world opinion coalesced against us.

2. *How strong a position would America have in a conference that followed a sustained air offensive?*

Any negotiation that followed an air offensive would probably take place in the framework of a large international conference. Hanoi and the Communist Bloc nations could be expected to seek such a conference, and we should be under great pressure from neutral countries to acquiesce.

We should not assume that our posture in such a conference would be very good. We would already have taken the fateful step of recasting our Southeast Asian role. No longer could we succeed in presenting ourselves as a great power engaged in helping a beleaguered small power at the small power's request. In the eyes of a great part of the world we would appear as the leading Free World power utilizing modern weapons of destruction to destroy the economic life of a defenseless small nation. Certainly this would be the thrust of Communist propaganda.

It would be reinforced by gloomy headshaking in Paris. We would be cast in an aggressive role as never before in the postwar world.

Let me reiterate once more that Indochina is not Korea. In bombing North Viet-Nam we would *not* be seeking to stop massive and overt aggression south of the Yalu River on behalf of the UN. We would appear instead to be a great power raining destruction on a small power because we accused that small power of instigating what much of the world would quite wrongly regard as an indigenous rebellion.

Under these circumstances our position at the conference table would be awkward—in spite of our best efforts to portray America's role in its true light. Certainly we would expect both the Communists and nonaligned powers to insist—as an indispensable prerequisite in any settlement—that the United States withdraw its military presence from Southeast Asia. We would expect also a cease-fire, which the United States would necessarily obey but which in the nature of the insurgency would be very hard to police.

It is hard to foretell how the conference would deal with the insurgency itself. Most of the member nations would instinctively seek some kind of reconciliation of the Vietnamese and Viet Cong elements through an enlargement of the governmental base. But, as will be pointed out, we should be able to achieve that result quite as easily—and in a better international climate—if we went to a conference that had not been preceded by an air offensive.

It may be contended that the scenario I have outlined is not one that the United States need follow. Instead of agreeing to a big conference, could we not undertake to pursue a negotiating track through direct or indirect approaches to Hanoi and try to bring about a political settlement that would not bog us down as happened in Geneva in 1962?

I seriously question the possibility that we could avoid a big conference. Once we had launched an air offensive we would find ourselves under great world pressure to stop the shooting and move to a conference table in the presence of other nations. The war, in effect, would have become everybody's business. We should have lost the option of quiet negotiation—and indeed a good deal of our ability to influence the choice of forum.

3. *What can we reasonably hope to achieve by a negotiation not preceded by direct military action against the North?*

- a. First of all we could expect the condition precedent to the beginning of negotiations to be an agreement for a cease-fire.

- b. As part of the settlement regular U.S. forces would almost certainly have to be withdrawn. This withdrawal, however, might be phased. It would commence only when the cease-fire was fully effective and provision might be made for the return of U.S. forces (at the request of the Saigon Government) if the cease-fire were violated.

- c. The base of the Saigon Government would

The Prophecy the President Rejected

have to be broadened to include Viet Cong elements.

d. Depending upon the format of the negotiation the independence of South Viet-Nam might be guaranteed by other signatory powers with possible provision for a control commission or some other kind of international pressure to police the security provisions of the agreement.

F.

The Possibility of a Diplomatic Settlement Not Preceded by an Air Offensive

1. *What preliminary steps should we take to minimize the cost to American prestige of a negotiated solution not preceded by military action?*

We are presently in South Viet-Nam because the South Vietnamese people, speaking through their Government, have asked us to help them resist Communist aggression. We have repeatedly stated that we will continue in South Viet-Nam "so long as the Vietnamese people wish us to help." We have tried to make clear to the world that we are prepared to assist any nation that asks our aid in defending its freedom against Communist attack.

The qualifying words "so long as the Vietnamese people wish us to help" assume two things:

a. That there is *in fact* a widespread desire on the part of the Vietnamese people to avoid a Communist take-over and that they are prepared to continue to risk their lives in a sustained struggle to achieve this end; and

b. That South Viet-Nam has an effective Government that can speak for the South Vietnamese people and can conduct the struggle on their behalf.

At the moment, both of these points are in doubt. Intelligence information discloses substantial war-weariness among the South Vietnamese people. This is backed up by a rising curve of desertions and the Government's increasing difficulty in filling the rolls through enlistment.

The fact that there is no effective South Vietnamese Government that can adequately direct the affairs of the country in the present war crisis hardly needs argument. Almost every substantive cable from Saigon underlines this point.

As a first step in preparing the ground for a political solution at minimum cost, we should make clear to the world how the juridical and political basis for continued American effort relates to the existing state of facts in South Viet-Nam.

In specific terms, this would involve the following steps:

a. We should clearly and emphatically reiterate the basis for our involvement in South Viet-Nam, emphasizing the qualifying phrase "so long as the South Vietnamese wish us to help." We should put other governments on notice that we do not intend to remain in South Viet-Nam, once it develops

that the Vietnamese people, speaking through their Government, no longer desire our help. We should, so far as possible, seek to make a virtue out of this position, emphasizing that, unlike the Communists, we never seek to impose our will on another country.

b. We might, at the same time, serve notice on the South Vietnamese Council that we are determined to continue the struggle and have the capability to do so but that this is possible *only* if they achieve a unity of purpose in Saigon, clearly express that unity, and create a Government free from factionalism and capable of carrying on the affairs of the country.

c. If properly managed, this notice should signal to whatever responsible elements remain in Saigon that they must declare themselves. It might be expected to have one of three effects:

(1) Hopefully—but not probably—it might result in pulling together the responsible elements in the country and lead to the creation of a unified government.

(2) It might free the capitulationists and neutralist elements to organize a government on neutralist principles.

(3) In spite of the fact that we had emphasized United States determination equally with the condition precedent, there would probably be a strong tendency in Saigon to regard this as a warning of ultimate United States disengagement. The most likely overt reaction would be ambiguous. But we would almost certainly accelerate existing covert probing of the possibilities of a deal with Viet Cong elements. (See SNIE 53-2-64, par. 10.)

2. *Should we seek immediate negotiations or a period of maneuver?*

It would probably be better for us to encourage a period of ambiguity than to seek immediate negotiations. The main argument on the other side is that the Viet Cong now have no prominent leader to represent them. In time they might gain one. But this factor seems more than offset by the arguments for a period of maneuver. A U.S. effort to force an abrupt showdown would increase the chances that the South Vietnamese would blame us for whatever ensued. A period of delay would permit the various sectors of Vietnamese opinion to adjust to the possibility of a political solution. Such a period would also permit the personalities who might otherwise be the victims of retaliation to make their own personal arrangements. And, by allowing a period of wheeling and dealing, the United States itself might play a more effective role in influencing the selection of a transitional government and affect the shape of the negotiations.

3. *What other Governments might be helpfully enlisted in setting the stage for a negotiated solution?*

The Governments that should be considered include:

- a. The United Kingdom
- b. Canada
- c. The Philippines
- d. Poland and India (through the ICC)

I do not suggest that we approach the French Government. Certainly De Gaulle's policy will be to try to bring about United States disengagement at maximum, rather than minimum, cost to United States prestige. It is important that we design our plan of action in such a manner as to avoid having it appear as a French diplomatic victory.

I am not prepared at this point to suggest the manner in which the good offices of other governments might be used, since this will require a study of the problem and the definition of a more precise course of policy.

G.

Framework for a Settlement

1. *What kinds of framework might be utilized for achieving a negotiated settlement?*

a. The *first* is a localized negotiation between a neutralist South Viet-Nam Government and the National Liberation Front. This would probably not lead to the reunification of Viet-Nam—at least not immediately—but merely to the creation of a government of national union. In reality, of course, the National Liberation Front would be speaking under the tutelage of the Hanoi Government, but the negotiations would have the appearance of a local reshuffling of the various elements involved in the international South Vietnamese struggle.

Localized in this way, the settlement would not contemplate any third-power guarantees—at least initially.

b. The *second* possibility is a negotiation between the Saigon Government and the Government in Hanoi. A settlement reached in this manner would be likely to lead to the reunification of Viet-Nam under a government largely dominated by Communists.

c. The *third* possibility is a large-scale approach to the "neutralization" of South Viet-Nam with third-power guarantees.

The effect of such a settlement would be to extend the Laos formula to South Viet-Nam. In view of present power relationships, the settlement would almost certainly mean the withdrawal of American forces.

d. The *fourth* possibility is a large-scale approach to the neutralization of all of Indochina (and even of Southeast Asia) under third-power guarantees.

This is essentially what General de Gaulle is proposing. He advocates a conference in which "many powers would participate." This means at least the fourteen powers that participated in developing the Geneva Accords. The outcome would presumably be a revision of the Geneva Accords so as to apply something akin to the Laos formula to the whole of Indochina.

2. *What type of framework would result in the best outcome for American interests?*

A strong argument can be made in favor of the first option—a local settlement. Such a settlement, worked out within South Viet-Nam, would mean the incorporation of National Liberation Front elements in the governmental base. But that government would also include elements drawn from the religious sects, the Army, and other factors of Vietnamese life. The result might well be an uneasy coalition in which the Communists would presumably be the most aggressive and dominant component. But the full effect of a Communist take-over would be diffused and postponed for a substantial period of time.

By making it possible for the South Vietnamese to work out a settlement among themselves—without the direct and overt interference of Hanoi—we would obscure and confuse the Communist victory by injecting elements that suggested the resolution of an internal revolt.

Such an approach would have the additional advantage that it would not directly involve Peiping. As a consequence the settlement would not appear as the overt extension of Chinese power further into Southeast Asia. If—as is often argued—the Viet Minh do not wish to have Red China playing too large a role in their affairs, this form of settlement might help them to resist Chinese domination. To that extent it could serve the purposes of the West.

We may be driven to this result and—if so—we should be prepared to minimize the breakage. But it is not a solution which we should seek as an object of policy.

Nor is a negotiation within the second framework. While the matter certainly deserves more intensive study than I have been able to give it, I can see definite disadvantages in a direct negotiation between Saigon and Hanoi in which no other powers would be present. There is a danger that such a negotiation would involve a satellite status for South Viet-Nam if it did not result in an actual reunification.

Certainly, a large-scale conference on the 1962 Geneva pattern would seem preferable to a direct Saigon-Hanoi negotiation. By providing for a continuing third-party involvement—plus some kind of national control mechanism—the great powers would continue to exercise some restraint against overt Communist moves in the country.

As General de Gaulle has suggested, a large conference would tend to dilute the nature of the direct confrontation between the Bloc and the Free World. It should result in a settlement that would provide at least some protection for non-Communist elements in the population.

General de Gaulle proposes that such a conference should not be limited to the problem of South Viet-Nam but should extend at least to all the territory of the old French Indochina. He has even indicated the possibility of extending it to all of Southeast Asia.

To accept the principle of a large conference does

not necessarily mean acceptance of all De Gaulle's assumptions. The virtues General de Gaulle sees in a large conference are that it would last a long time—a year or even two years—and that during this period the Viet Cong would maintain a cease-fire. The maintenance of a cease-fire, however—particularly in the case of an insurgency such as that in South Viet-Nam where there are no well-defined battle lines—does not seem a very realistic possibility in view of our other experiences with the Communists. In the 1954 Geneva Conference the Viet Minh used military pressure throughout the conference to influence the political result—including the siege of Dien Bien Phu.

General de Gaulle also puts great emphasis on another assumption, that Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese Government have inherited the ancient Indochinese determination to resist Chinese domination. This tendency, however, might be better served by a localized conference than by a conference in which China played a dominant role. Certainly it is hard to accept General de Gaulle's thesis that the Red Chinese Government is not expansionist, that it is preoccupied with domestic problems, and that for at least the next 10-15 years Peiping will be content to leave Southeast Asia alone—so long as it is not menaced by an American presence in that peninsula.

3. Does the UN offer a possible alternative framework for a political solution?

The main difficulty with a conference solution is that experience shows that *ad hoc* machinery, usually constituted on a Troika basis, is ineffective in policing the settlement and in enforcing the safeguards established for neutrality.

An alternative would appear to be UN involvement. With all its defects, UN intervention in the Middle East, the Congo, and even in Cyprus has given us advantages that would not have been present in a situation of direct national involvement.

Of course, there are a number of obvious objections. U Thant, for example, has said that the situation in Viet-Nam would be beyond the capacity of the organization. Moreover, the interests of Red China and North Viet-Nam, two nonmembers, are very directly involved.

The balance that should be struck among these and other factors affecting the use of the UN cannot be confidently determined without further intensive study. Nevertheless, in the past months we have already taken some tentative steps looking toward UN involvement in Indochina. I am convinced that this path should not be abandoned without further intensive exploration and that this exploration should be undertaken at once.

I would certainly see grave disadvantages in extending the scope of the conference beyond Indochina. The question whether it should include all of Indochina—North Viet-Nam, Laos, and Cambodia, in addition to South Viet-Nam—is a tactical one to which we should give careful study. Certainly we have already dealt with Laos in the context of such a conference, and we have expended a good deal of capital in trying to prevent a conference in the case of Cambodia. But we should, I think, take a further look at this whole question within the context of our Southeast Asia policy.

CONCLUSION

I offer this memorandum not as a definitive document but as a challenge to the assumptions of our current Viet-Nam policy. I have tried to suggest areas of exploration that could lead to other options.

It may be observed that I have dwelt at length on the probable reaction of other countries to alternative lines of action. This is not because I believe that in formulating our foreign policy we should be unduly preoccupied with what others want us to do or that we should be continually looking over our shoulder. But our present line of policy has been justified primarily on political grounds. It has been defended on the proposition that America cannot afford to promote a settlement in South Viet-Nam without first demonstrating the superiority of its own military power—or, in other words, giving the North Vietnamese a bloody nose. To do otherwise would enormously diminish American prestige around the world and cause others to lose faith in the tenacity of our purpose and the integrity of our promises.

I have, therefore, sought to meet this thesis head-on by discussing the effect on governments and public opinion in other nations.

There are conspicuous *lacunae* in this very preliminary paper. I have not attempted, for example, to discuss the defense arrangements that we would have to make with Thailand or the possible need to reinforce British assurances with regard to Malaysia. I think it likely that the development of a political solution (whether or not preceded by an air offensive) might administer extreme unction to SEATO. But that is all a matter for further study.

What I am urging is that our Southeast Asian policy be looked at in all of its aspects and in the light of our total world situation. It is essential that this be done before we commit military forces to a line of action that could put events in the saddle and destroy our freedom to choose the policies that are at once the most effective and the most prudent. □

Spellings reproduced here, as in the original memorandum, were customary at the time it was written. Thus Viet-Nam (Vietnam); Peiping (Peking), and Red China (People's Republic of China).

Meanings of abbreviations are as follows: GVN—Govern-

ment of (South) Vietnam; ROK—Republic of (South) Korea; NVN—North Vietnam; ICC—International Control Commission for Vietnam; SNIE—Special National Intelligence Estimate; VC—Viet Cong; DRV—Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam.